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STATE FOR AF/S (ELIZABETH PELLETREAU AND GREG GARLAND),  
AF/PD, AF/EPS, AF/RSA, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NAMIBIAN OPPOSITION FEARS ZIMBABWE-STYLE POLITICAL  
FUTURE

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11. (U) SUMMARY: Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) senior officials and Council of Democrats (COD) President Ben Ulunga, in recent meetings with Embassy officials, voiced their concern that the Namibian government is sliding toward autocracy under the continued influence of Founding President Sam Nujoma. Both parties complained of SWAPO efforts to manipulate elections and claimed that large divisions exist within SWAPO over issues such as tolerating viable opposition parties and the crisis in Zimbabwe. In response to questions on the SWAPO Youth League's inflammatory public statements, the opposition leaders described the organization as trying to say what Nujoma wants to hear to promote their own self interests. Underscoring opposition fears of Zimbabwe-style repression, RDP officials were stoned through the windows of their car on July 11th while organizing a rally in Okuryangava, a SWAPO stronghold. Nevertheless, the perpetrators were subsequently arrested. The ruling party,s demonstrated unwillingness to date to reign in radical and violent elements in its midst may give credence to the opposition,s fears of a slide into a Zimbabwe-style breakdown in the rule of law and rise of political intolerance as Namibia moves toward elections in 2009. END SUMMARY.

Namibia and Nujoma: Increasingly Autocratic

12. (U) On 10 July Poloff and Washington analysts met with Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) President Hidipo Hamutenya and Secretary General Jessaya Nyamu at their headquarters in Windhoek. Hamutenya stressed that they had formed the RDP in response to SWAPO,s slide toward autocracy under Founding President Sam Nujoma. Hamutenya and Nyamu described SWAPO and the Namibian government as still firmly in Nujoma,s hands, with President Hifikepunye Pohamba wielding little influence. In reference to their own ouster from SWAPO,s leadership, Nyamu noted that &all African dictators begin by pushing out their peers,8 and compared Nujoma to his close friend Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe. Ben Ulunga in a 11 July meeting with the Ambassador echoed the RDP officials saying, "What,s happening in Zimbabwe is only a step away8 for Namibia, and that &SWAPO rides both the democratic and dictatorial horses.8 He said the reason Namibia has not encountered the same problems as Zimbabwe is that SWAPO is still firmly in power and does not have to behave like Mugabe to maintain control. Nonetheless, he argued the opposition must move strongly against Zimbabwe-style developments in Namibia.

Northern Elections Rigged?

13. (SBU) Nyamu alleged that the by-elections the RDP recently lost in Eenhana had been rigged. He said the RDP was &shocked8 by the margin of loss and argued it was statistically impossible that his party had garnered such a small percentage of the vote. He claimed SWAPO learned how to manipulate the elections from Zimbabwe. He went on to say that one way or another, the ruling party would not allow the RDP to win. Hamutenya said SWAPO had stuffed and exchanged the ballot boxes. He also alleged that SWAPO had given a party owned printing company\*Namprint\*a monopoly on ballot printing, which had been instrumental in fixing the vote. (Comment: Hamutenya was responsible for setting up Namprint and helping it entrench its dominance in winning ballot printing tenders when he served in the SWAPO leadership. End Comment.) He explained that ballots are carried to a central location for counting and that remains a serious problem for transparency. (Comment: In an alternate view of the recent by-election in the North, a close interlocutor in charge of the Eenhana election told Embassy officials he was confident that the by-election,s voting and counting activities had been above board. The official related how the SWAPO officials present for the counting, including the Governor, appeared more shocked at the outcome than their RDP counterparts, having expected a much closer race. End Comment.) Nyamu said the RDP is planning to consult with other opposition parties about how to make elections more transparent. When asked if SWAPO would allow international election monitors, Nyamu thought SWAPO would permit them and, now that there is a credible opposition, such monitors are becoming increasingly necessary.

14. (U) Ulenga argued that while Namibia has not reached

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Zimbabwe levels of corruption, like in Zimbabwe SWAPO manipulates elections at the grassroots level by casting the opposition parties as tools of the West. Ulenga said that the common people are still very ignorant, so they believe whatever the government says, and will not try to find the answers on their own. He stressed it is key to raise the political awareness of the people so that rumors have less impact.

SWAPO Divided

15. (U) The opposition leaders mentioned that large divisions exist within SWAPO over issues such as dealing with viable opposition parties and the crisis in Zimbabwe. Nyamu, after stressing that Nujoma is controlling SWAPO party matters despite his retirement, said the Founding President is allowing the party to be taken over by younger, more radical SWAPO members, who disrespect intellectualism and have no minds of their own. The Nujoma faction of SWAPO has manipulated party elections to downgrade senior SWAPO officials and ministers, and some party members are unhappy but unable to speak out. He said there is "much suspicion within SWAPO,8 with many SWAPO officials accused of being too close to the RDP. Nonetheless, SWAPO has hesitated to oust them, fearing these officials would then openly support the opposition. He also implied that Pohamba would like to speak out more strongly against Zimbabwe, but cannot due to Nujoma,s continued support for Mugabe. Similarly, Ulenga said Prime Minister Nahas Angula and some at the MFA do not truly agree with the public line on Zimbabwe, but do not have the ability to stand up on the issue.

SWAPO Youth League\*Trying To Please Nujoma

16. (U) In response to a question on why SWAPO officials do not try to correct some of the SWAPO Youth League,s (SPYL) more outrageous public statements, Ulenga described the SPYL as &an empty drum8 that listens to Nujoma and repeats what he says. He said that in a recent Parliamentary meeting a SPYL member made over the top statements that embarrassed Prime Minister Angula. However, when Angula questioned the SPYL member, he replied that as a member of the &radical

youth<sup>8</sup> he was entitled to speak however he chose; and Angula subsequently backed down. Nyamu alternately described the SPYL public line as &chaos,<sup>8</sup> and said that the organization does not necessarily follow instructions from anyone, but that Nujoma &likes it<sup>8</sup> that way, and if theytake their orders from anyone it would be him. He also described youth league members as &running dogs<sup>8</sup> who try to say what Nujoma wants to hear for self-aggrandizement.

Comment

17. (SBU) Underscoring RDP fears of Zimbabwe-style repression, RDP officials were stoned through the windows of their car on July 11th while organizing a rally in Okuryangava, a SWAPO stronghold. Officials suffered bruises and one sustained a broken arm. Three SWAPO members have been accused of the crime and their case has been scheduled for October 23, according to The Namibian newspaper. The subsequent rally was moved to a new location after police claimed they could not guarantee security at Okuryangava after the stoning incident. The police also announced all future requests for political rallies at the Okuryangava venue will be denied\*it will be telling to see if both SWAPO and opposition rally requests are denied. On a positive note, the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) is contemplating new proposals to strengthen enforcement of the Code of Conduct for political parties and other measures to ensure the transparency of elections.

18. (SBU) The ruling party,s demonstrated unwillingness so far to reign in radical and violent elements in its midst gives credence to the opposition,s fears of a slide into a Zimbabwe-style breakdown in the rule of law and rise in political intolerance. Given Namibia,s opposition parties, inclination toward internal party strife and general adversity toward inter-party cooperation, it is difficult to imagine the rise of a viable opposition to the ruling party,s hegemony in the near term. Nevertheless, the RDP is the most serious threat SWAPO has had to face since independence. Moreover, true to Nyamu,s word, on July 17 four opposition parties met at RDP headquarters to discuss &issues of major common concern surrounding the conduct of elections in the country,<sup>8</sup> according to local press reports.

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